EUI WORKING PAPERS

EUROPEAN FORUM

EUI Working Paper EUF No. 95/8

Gendered Economies of Time:
Women Workers in Nort-West England

MIRIAM A. GLUCKSMANN

European University Institute, Florence

The European Forum, set up in 1992 by the High Council, is a Centre for Advanced Studies at the European University Institute in Florence. Its aim is to bring together in a given academic year high-level experts on a particular theme, giving prominence to international, comparative and interdisciplinary aspects of the subject. It furthers the co-ordination and comparison of research in seminars, round-tables and conferences attended by Forum members and invited experts, as well as teachers and researchers of the Institute. Its research proceedings are published through articles in specialist journals, a thematic yearbook and EUI Working Papers.

This Working Paper has been written in the context of the 1994/5 European Forum programme on 'Gender and the Use of Time', directed by Professor Olwen Hufton and Professor Yota Kravaritou.

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE, FLORENCE

EUROPEAN FORUM

EUI Working Paper **EUF** No. 95/8

Gendered Economies of Time: Women Workers in North-West England

MIRIAM A. GLUCKSMANN

BADIA FIESOLANA, SAN DOMENICO (FI)

Printed in Italy in December 1995
European University Institute
Badia Fiesolana
I – 50016 San Domenico (FI)
Italy

Gendered Economies of Time: Women Workers in North-West England

by Miriam A. Glucksmann

This chapter draws on oral-history based research in north-west England to explore the temporal dimension of the interconnections between paid employment and domestic labour for two groups of married women who began work in the 1920s and 1930s. These were textile workers, weavers and spinners in the cotton industry, and women engaged in a range of casual jobs. For each group the gender divisions and characteristics of their paid work intermeshed with the gendered divisions and characteristics of the labour undertaken within their households so that the interface between the two was strongly gendered. But I want to show how that intermeshing was different in the two cases, resulting in a distinct pattern specific to each. This difference can be evidenced in numerous ways, but here I concentrate on the time dimension, drawing attention to the different ways in which the two groups used

chronometric or clock time and how they subjectively experienced and perceived temporality. The aim is to explore the distinctive insights that might be provided by an analytical focus on temporality, and the extent to which it offers a systematic means of pinpointing variation both within and between genders.

I begin with a discussion of the advantages and possible pitfalls for sociological and historical study of a temporal perspective on gender and work, before introducing the two groups of women. The central part of the chapter is devoted to examination of the distinctions in temporalities between them and concentrates on their working lives. This is followed by a briefer consideration of broader differences in temporality in relation to the life course.

'Economy of time'

My observations will be concerned with what might be usefully be termed an 'economy of time'. Time can be conceptualised as a medium of exchange that is broader or wider than money. Time may be bought and sold as a commodity. It may be a scarce resource, with potential conflicts over its allocation and use. Exchanges of time may be equal or unequal; some people may be in a position to appropriate or exploit other peoples' time, or use of time, or products of time. Time would constitute an integral dimension of power in relationships where some people possessed more control over it than others or had the ability to determine what was done with it (both their own and that of others). Many exchanges of time do involve money, as in the case of formal paid employment when money is exchanged directly for labour time. Money may also buy time indirectly, as in the purchase of the products of labour. But, whether direct or indirect, money exchanges far from embrace all exchanges of time. Many labour activities

involve exchanges of time or particular allocations of time use that have no financial dimension.

Developing a framework for analysing labour along such lines, in contrast to a framework confined solely to monetary exchange, would provide not only a much broader conception but also one that is more appropriate to taking seriously women's labour and gender differences in work. Using time as the basis for an umbrella notion of labour activity provides a means of conceptualising and acknowledging as 'work' domestic labour, voluntary work, as well as the many kinds of caring and other non-waged work, alongside of paid employment.

In previous research on women assembly line workers during the inter-war period I drew attention to the reallocation of working class womens' labour from the household economy to the formal wage economy as an important aspect of the development of mass production and consumption. In order to understand this shift, which represented one dimension of a more thorough-going transformation of the relation between these two spheres, I argued that, rather than looking at each sphere separately, we needed to look at the 'total social organization of labour' (or TSOL), that is, at all of the labour undertaken in a society, irrespective of who it was undertaken by, in which institutions, under what conditions, and how. By treating all labour activity as work such an overall perspective would enable more adequate analysis of the dynamics connecting paid work and unpaid household labour.[1] Now,

---

1 See M. Glucksmann, *Women Assemble. Women workers and the new industries in inter-war Britain,* London: Routledge, 1990. The notion of the TSOL is developed more theoretically in 'Why "Work"? Gender and the "total social organisation of labour"', *Gender, Work and Organisation,* Volume 2, no.2, 63-75, April 1995.

having thought more systematically about time I think that time too must be seen as integral to the TSOL.

But in talking of an 'economy of time' two caveats must be emphasized. The first is that time has no neutral or natural existence, and this applies even to working time that is reckoned according to the clock.[2] Moreover, once viewed from a perspective broader than that of the exchange of commodities, time cannot be seen as a homogeneous medium, such as Marx confined himself to in his concept of 'abstract labour time'. Time-use studies[3] can also operate with a simplistic notion of measurement in terms of standard units, whereby one hour of assembly line working, for example, is equated with one hour of, say, walking the dog, as if this conversion were unproblematic. On the contrary, the expenditure of time that occurs in different economic spheres or social relationships is probably incommensurable. It is certainly not homogeneous; nor can it be straightforwardly converted or 'clocked' since there is no common external standard for conversion, other than clock time itself. Walking the dog and working on an assembly line are activities that involve such different temporalities that to count an hour spent on each does not really tell us very much. If no neutral objective external framework exists from which to view time we should be wary of the danger of flattening the

---

2 On this point see also Richard Whipp's criticisms of E. P. Thompson in '"A time to every purpose": an essay on time and work'. in Patrick Joyce (ed.) *The Historical Meanings of Work,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,1987.

3 One of the most successful and comprehensive attempts is Jonathan Gershuny's notion of 'chains of provision' outlined in 'Time, technology and the informal economy', in R. Pahl (ed.) *On Work,* Oxford: Blackwell,1988. He provides a model for analysing the interconnection between technical innovation, production in the money economy, informal production and consumption, and historical changes in time use between them.

different temporalities of different kinds of work and hence obscuring their varied qualities, experience and meaning.

For the purposes of this chapter, the term 'temporality' is used to denote a distinctive structuring of time, of which chronometric or standard linear time is just one instance amongst many. Different temporalities could be expected to be accompanied by different experiences of time, but differences in temporality cannot be reduced to how they are experienced. Thus it is not possible to add up inequalities in exchanges of time that occur in commodity production to those occurring in the household economy. The attempt to develop an overall system of time-accounting for all the varied forms of work would inevitably reduce all to the single dimension of clock time and so foreclose precisely those advantages offered by a temporal perspective in the first place.

The second caveat concerns essentialism. Bringing a gender perspective to the analysis of time does not imply that there is a 'female', or a 'male', experience of time common to all women or all men. Yet some feminist critiques[4] of E.P.Thompson's writings about industrial time come dangerously close to this by suggesting that women's time is more appropriately conceptualised as cyclical or following biological rhythms and phases of life while men's is linear and progressive, approximating more closely to industrial time. This line of thinking also tends to downplay women's situation as wage workers and the conflicts over control of time in paid employment which have affected them equally as men, even if

---

4 For example Frieda Johles Forman (ed.) *Taking our Time: Feminist Perspectives on Temporality,* Toronto, 1989, discussed in Katie Holmes 'Making time: representations of temporality in Australian women's diaries of the 1920s and 1930s', *Australian Historical Studies,* April 1994, 1-18. Forman seeks an elusive balance that affirms women's biological difference from men but without celebrating women's natural cycle.

in specific and gendered ways. Whether they are assembly line workers, whose employers try to squeeze extra productivity out of every second of the time they are paid for[5] or, at the opposite end of the spectrum of exchange between time and money, whether they are domestic servants with no formal contract of employment, whose hours of work are open-ended and whose labour employers can demand virtually at any time of day or night,[6] they all have a gendered temporal relation to waged work. If even paid work time is differently organised, reckoned, experienced and challenged for and by women in different occupations and industries (there is no common relation of women workers to working time) then this is much more the case for the relation of women in general to time as such.

I hope that the situation of the particular women workers that I am going to discuss here will make clear that differences exist *between* women in the gendered structuration of time. All of the women had worked in textiles or had been casually employed in the Greater Manchester area, in Salford, Bolton, Oldham, or Little Hulton. All were born between 1895 and 1928 (most between 1910 and 1920) and all started work as soon as they reached the age of fourteen.[7] That women who

---

5 For assembly line workers conflict over time (centred on intensification, speed-up, Taylorism and so on) was between employers and employees. It would have a gendered dimension if male rate setters or supervisors gained from work intensification for women workers. But this would be a gendered conflict (between different sections of the work force) interlinked with another kind of conflict (between women workers and their employers).

6 It was notable that women assemblers I interviewed who had previously worked as domestic servants stressed the advantages of their new employment in terms of the relative freedom of time they gained.

7 A series of interviews was conducted in 1991 with twenty retired women who were now in their seventies and eighties. In addition four group interviews were held with groups of three, five and six people, two of

(continues on next page)

superficially appear very similar (all were working class, manual, married, full-time workers living in close proximity to each other and in the same historical period) should in fact be so distinct both in their *use* and in their *experience* of time serves as a warning against making any essentialist or universal or overgeneral claims about women's relation to time as women.

Casual women workers

Since the married women and mothers in this group did not conform to standard definitions of 'economic activity' they would probably not appear as 'workers' in official statistics. Nevertheless they were certainly occupied full-time in waged work, often by doing a combination of multiple part-time jobs. These ranged from services performed for pay for other women, such as childcare or clothes washing, to more formally defined employment as office or night cleaners, or serving in a pub. In hours, such work usually amounted to the equivalent of a full-time job, even if not undertaken over a continuous nine hour day. It was normal for them to be permanently engaged in this way.

Although poorly paid their wages were essential to household income, contributing to a basic standard of living, especially when supplementing a low or unreliable male wage. Significantly, most husbands of the casual women workers were also in insecure employment themselves, working on the docks, in the building industry, or as lorry drivers. Most husbands gave their wives housekeeping money, retaining the remainder of

---

them in sheltered accomodation and including men as well as women. This project was made possible by the award of a Hallsworth Senior Research Fellowship at the University of Manchester Department of Sociology in 1990-91. For a more complete account see *Cottons and Casuals: Gender and Work in Lancashire* (forthcoming).

their wage for personal spending. The whole of the women's earnings, by contrast, was used to buy basics, particularly food and clothing for children.

Yet, despite effectively working full-time and earning a significant proportion of family finances, it was clear from the way they talked that these women's self-perception was as mothers and housewives rather than as workers. The sort of paid jobs they did were generally held in low esteem, as hardly worthy of being considered 'proper' work. And this appeared to have affected the casual workers' own self-worth, which was much more rooted in their domestic than their employed status, a situation quite at odds with the textile workers.

Annie Preston of Salford was a good example. Her husband was a building labourer and she had worked as a weaver and in munitions until the first of her five children was born in 1941. Then she took up night cleaning at the university, working right through the night until 7 the next morning. In addition, Mrs Preston regularly did the washing for two other women at the municipal wash-house, services for which she was paid. In terms of time, it is significant that this service-performing element of her paid work was not separated off from her own domestic labour since she did her own washing in the wash-house at the same time.

I was always on the last hour at the wash-house because I worked ten o'clock till eight so I had to rush but I used to go for myself and then me cousin, she had a bad foot. I went for her and another one, three times a week.

The same was true for those who looked after other women's children, or who prepared cooked dinners for others. Such work activities were not distinguished temporally for a casual worker from performing her own domestic labour. Moreover the absence of any formally set hours marking off domestic labour time from leisure or 'free' time meant that no

meaningful distinction could be made between periods of time allocated to paid work, domestic labour, and leisure.

This is not to say that the casual workers I interviewed felt no pressure of time. On the contrary, and as Mrs Preston suggests, it was a rush to fit everything in. All gave detailed accounts of their daily and weekly routines for cleaning, cooking, washing and childcare. They emphasized the need for a pre-planned efficient method in order to get everything done in the time available and the necessity of a regular routine and rational ordering of tasks during the day and week. Success in keeping house, linen, and children clean and fed in the constant battle against dirt, poverty and the clock represented an important source of satisfaction.

In the memory of casual women workers a rigid sexual division of labour reigned at home: men went out to work and did no housework or childcare whatsoever; many returned home for their meals only to go out again to the pub once they had eaten and spend the evening drinking with other men. Women, on the other hand, undertook all financial management and all domestic labour, by necessity on a highly labour intensive basis. Their leisure-time was much more restricted than that of their husbands and their leisure activities not so formalised, often being spent at home in the company of other women. Although many regularly went to the cinema they rarely frequented the pub, if at all.[8]

---

8 In *Leisure, Gender and Poverty: working-class culture in Salford and Manchester, 1900-1939,* Buckingham: Open University Press, 1992 Andrew Davies provides a vivid and detailed account of leisure activities of the time and place which highlights their highly gendered character.

As Mrs Preston put it:

The man's place was in the work and the woman's was in the home. It was supposed to be all done by the time he came in from work and all he did was come in, have a wash, sit down and his meal would be put in front of him and that was it, wasn't it?

Her words were echoed by Rose Whitely, whose husband often worked night shifts:

– Q.: Did your husband help at all?

– R.W.: *Well no. My husband had the attitude it was all your job. He had nothing to do with that. His job was to bring the wage in and that was him finished.*

– Q.: You can't have seen much of each other?

– R.W.: *We didn't, no. It was hello, goodbye. And he worked six nights a week. He used to start work Sunday night to Saturday morning, home Saturday morning and then he'd go for a drink Saturday dinner and he'd be out Saturday night. Ten years I brought the kids up myself.*

Despite her husband doing night work and Mrs Whitely's many jobs money was short. Forty years on she still remembered exactly how she had to budget for food so as to last the week:

We laugh now and the children laugh when I tell them. I used to buy a joint at weekend, lamb for Sunday and that lamb used to last until about Wednesday or Thursday. Because we had roast on Sunday, and then we would have cold meat on Monday. Tuesday it would be potato hash. Wednesday would be just potatoes but I just used to put more spuds in. And Thursday they would probably just get a crust on it. It had to last because the wages were so low.

– Q.: What about Friday and Saturday then?

– R.W.: *Well you got your wages and it would be a chippy thing on a Friday.*

Thus, it was not only in their paid employment that casual women worked in gender segregated single-sex occupations. The household too, leisure activities, and other aspects of family and community life, were also characterised by strict gender division. Women's invidious position in relation to men both in paid work and in domestic labour was reflected in their very strong perception of gender difference and inequality. Such a situation could not be understood in terms of any time exchange of equivalents between the man bringing in the wage, and the woman in return doing unpaid domestic labour.

It was evident that the low earning capacity of casual women workers reinforced their arduous domestic labour: they did not earn enough to buy time-saving or labour-saving ready-made food or clothes, laundry services, domestic appliances or other consumer durables. This inability to convert money into time resulted in their long hours of paid work being matched also by very long hours of unpaid domestic labour. They could not buy the goods or services to alleviate domestic chores which might in turn have released time to engage in better paid work. In contrast male time was strictly divided into work time as purchased by the wage versus leisure time as their *own* time, when they were serviced by women or could go out on the town.

Thus a dual vicious circle connected women's work and gender inequalities in both spheres. Women were in a weak position in the labour market: they could not command high wages and so expended much time for relatively little reward. And they were in a weak position in the home: while they contributed income, labour and time to the household, men contributed wages but appropriated their wives' labour and their time. Gender inequality for women in the two spheres was thus mutually reinforcing. Casual women workers' time was appropriated by their employers, their husbands and the other women for whom they performed services. It was in this sense a distinctive gendered temporality and experienced as such.

Women weavers

By contrast, the nexus of relations linking gender and work was quite different for women weavers, spinners and other cotton workers. There was a tradition in the textile industry of married women and mothers continuing permanently in full-time and 'standard' employment until retirement age. Their earnings were relatively high (locally and nationally for women's wages at the time) and stable, equivalent to men's wages for similar work and often on a par with their husbands, many of whom also worked in mills.

The women weavers I interviewed bought ready-made meals (fish and chips or pie dinners) and factory-produced clothes, laundry services[9] and, notably, domestic appliances. They 'farmed out' their children during the week to be looked after by relatives or neighbours whom they paid. Many bought labour-saving consumer durables as soon as they became available, and the proportion who had electric irons, vacuum cleaners, and especially washing machines in the 1930s was remarkable.

For example Edith Ashworth of Little Hulton was a life-time weaver, who 'farmed out' her two children, born in 1932 and 1937, with her mother, for money. She had started work at twelve, married a miner in 1932 and their combined income was sufficiently large for them to buy their own house, and for her to buy a washing machine as early as 1936.

---

9 Joan Beauchamp had noted that it was common for married women weavers in the early years of the twentieth century to buy cooked dinners and laundry services. See *Women Who Work,* London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1937:17.

A more equal domestic division of labour complemented this greater similarity with men in pay and manner of employment. According to their wives, many husbands took some responsibility for housework, cooking and childcare. Most also handed their entire pay packet to their wives, while other couples had a 'one purse' arrangement. Many women weavers appeared to accord so little significance to housework that they had little to say about it when interviewed, and they were not nearly as spontaneously forthcoming about cleaning, cooking, or washing as the 'casual' women had been. They gave the distinct impression of taking domestic labour very much in their stride.

The picture emerged, on the surface at least, of a more 'companionate' marriage of partners, yet differing from the conventional model by the absence of an explicit ideology of the home. There was little evidence of the hostility between the sexes over domestic labour so strongly expressed by the casual workers.

In her testimony Lily Hunt, for example, does not make much of her domestic labour, in contrast to her paid work which she discussed at length. A weaver from Oldham, born in 1911, and married in 1939, to another mill worker, she had two children.

– Q.: How did you manage doing housework and cooking when you were working full-time?

– Mrs Hunt: *It didn't seem to be any problem. No, you just had a routine. We just had to do it at night. I used to make my dinner at night for the day after. And whoever was home first of the two of us would set the tea going. I used to make meat puddings one night for the day after, and all sorts of things. You had to have a routine to do your work at night.*

– Q.: And did your husband help at all?

– Mrs Hunt: *Mine did. He helped with the housework. He washed up. I didn't wash up. He saw to the boy while I saw to the girl.*

And Kath Hinton's[10] account is even less expansive:

– Q.: And how did you manage with your housework and everything when you were working?

– K.H.: *Well that was done at night, when the children were in bed.*

– Q.: Did you have a different night for different things?

– K.H.: *No, there was no set routine, I just did it as I felt like it, but something got done every night.*

Kath Hinton was unusual in being so explicit about her lack of routine. Like the casual women, Lily Hunt and all the other weavers interviewed emphasized the necessity of having an organised routine, with time slots specifically ear-marked for the various domestic tasks on an hourly, daily or weekly basis. But, importantly, for many weavers, unlike the casual women, this organisation of domestic labour also included their husbands' time.

However, most weavers clearly thought that such routines were unworthy of detailed description. Given this reticence, it was notable how much more expansive they were about outlining their mothers routines, a generation earlier, than their own. 'JP', a Bolton weaver born in 1908, for example, gives a detailed account of the housework she had to do as a teenager after she had come home from her paid work in the mill. She had entered the mill on the 'half-time' system at the age

---

10 Also a weaver, Mrs Hinton went on to work in engineering factories assembling computers when the weaving sheds closed down in the 1960s.

of twelve knotting quilts. The timing of tasks and days remained clearly imprinted on her memory at a distance of more than sixty years.

– Q.: Were there certain days for different sorts of household duties?

– A.: *Oh yes, washing at Monday. Washing and ironing Monday and Tuesday. At Wednesday in them days it weren't stainless steel, you had to clean your knives, forks and spoons. We used to have to whitning, metal polish, and there were one night when we had to sit down and do all the cutlery and all that. We had a fender, it were steel, a long fender and we used to have to emery paper it and then put whitning on it and shine it with a duster and then on another night we'd have to do the black leading. Black leading the grate and all that and then on another night we'd scrub all the floors. We'd something to do every day.* [11]

Economically, the difference between the two groups of women was marked. For the weavers there was a ratchet effect whereby their higher earning capacity enabled them to reduce the time and labour devoted to domestic chores. Their greater financial independence gave them more control over their own lives. Women were not so financially dependent on men and men did not expect to be serviced so extensively by women, and this resulted in weavers' household relationships being structured by gender in distinct ways from the casual workers. For weavers greater gender equality in employment and in the home were mutually self-reinforcing, as was inequality for the casual workers.

---

11 *Growing Up in Bolton*, 1981-3, 34 JP/SS/1B/009 Transcript: 12.

Exchanges of time, money, labour

It should now be evident that weavers and casual workers did not share an identical relation to time. They differed with respect to their use of time and their degree of control over time both in relation to their paid employment and to their household responsibilities.

The working day was structured differently for each group with work time, domestic labour time and non-work time being far more distinctly demarcated from each other for the weavers as separate time-periods or blocks of the day, and far less so for casual workers. The weavers conducted all their paid labour in a 'place of work' under contractual conditions of employment and so had a clear temporal (and spatial) cut-off point between what they treated as 'work' and the rest of the day which they were less likely to describe as work, and to experience differently. Of course this was partly because they were in a position to buy time with money through purchasing services or consumer durables, and also partly because their use of time did not differ so markedly from that of their husbands. Weavers were thus in a stronger position than casual women workers to convert time and money in either direction: not only could they buy time with money but they could also buy money with time by means of their relatively higher earning capacity in paid employment.

But for the casual women different kinds of labour activity were not structurally or temporally differentiated from each other. Paid servicing work and domestic labour might be undertaken simultaneously and not in a formal workplace but rather in the wash-house or in their own home. The activities and relationships of paid work were thus inextricable from other non-work activities and relationships. Their commodified time was embedded in time that was not commodified so that they were

in effect constantly negotiating the relationship between these two dimensions of work time, unlike the weavers whose commodified time was distinct from non-commodified time.[12] Less formal and less temporally separate hours of work for the casual women made the distinction between time allocated to work/domestic labour/leisure one that held little meaning for them. However, in their case, their husbands' relation to these same activities and time-use was very different from their own. No time was allocated by husbands to domestic labour, and their paid work-time remained absolutely distinct from leisure-time.

But looking now from the perspective of *control* over time it might appear, at first glance, that the casual women had an advantage over weavers. Certainly it was clear that weavers enjoyed greater control over the disposal of household time: they had more call than the casual women on their husbands' time to undertake housework, and they could 'acquire' time by spending money to substitute for their own labour. From this perspective, when weavers purchased services from other local women, including their neighbours and even their own mothers and sisters, the most salient point to emerge was their ability to buy their own time in contrast to the inability of their neighbours and relatives to do the same. Yet the same set of relationships has often been interpreted by feminist social historians as a form

---

12 Much sociological writing implies that an individual's work time is all of one kind, either commodified or not, industrial or not. See Barbara Adam's *Time and Social Theory,* Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990, especially Chapter 5 for a discussion of Anthony Giddens' ideas on commodified time as theorised in *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism.* Vol 1, *Power, Property and the State,* London: Macmillan, 1981 and 'Time and social organisation', in *Social Theory and Modern Sociology,* Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987: 140-65. Yet the casual women workers provide a clear instance of workers who simultaneously engage in both kinds of work. Yet they could in no way be conceived as a 'leftover' from a pre-industrial epoch.

of redistribution of financial resources amongst a community network of women.

But weavers' control over time in the domestic sphere was predicated on the very absence of an equivalent ability to control time in their paid employment. While in the weaving sheds or mills weavers were not in a position to determine or organise their own use of time. The payment system, usually piece-rates, put them under extreme pressure to work as fast as possible and gave little opportunity for flexibility over time-use. But this is only to state the obvious: weavers worked under the classic conditions of wage labour, selling the use of their labour-time and receiving a wage in exchange. There was a pay-off between these two parts of their lives, where extreme pressure in one gave the possibility of less pressure in the other.

The casual workers, on the other hand, seemed to enjoy greater control over their paid work, being able to determine when and how they accomplished it. Because they fitted jobs in, 'boxed and coxed', and could undertake the various tasks on different days or at different times of the day with a certain degree of latitude, casual workers appeared to have more control to determine how they organized their working day than weavers. But this would be a superficial interpretation: since it was just as much a necessity for casual workers to sell their time in order to acquire money, their greater flexibility over the disposal of labour time related only to the management of time rather than giving them any real control over the disposal of time.[13] Their situation carried a certain flexibility with regard to time management, but it would be quite misleading to conclude from this that they actually controlled the time or

---

13 The situation with regard to household income and finance was similar: managing money did not confer control or ownership over it. For a discussion and account of household financial allocative systems see Jan Pahl *Money and Marriage,* London: Macmillan, 1989.

'possessed' it themselves any more than the weavers.[14] They worked also under time-pressure and against the clock, but in a different way.

Perhaps these variations between the two work situations lend weight to the point made at the beginning of the chapter about the incommensurability of time-use when labour is undertaken under differing economic relations. Qualitative differences between different kinds of work, especially with regard to temporality, make it innappropriate to try to compare or measure or equate or add up or subtract in any quantitative manner time-uses and time-exchanges when they occur across different economic spaces.

Weavers and casual women workers differed in their exchanges of time along two dimensions: first, in their paid work with their employers, regardless of whether these involved formal or informal economic relations; and second, in domestic labour with their husbands and with other women. In terms of chronometric or clock time, granted the greater economic vulnerability and poverty of the casual women, more of their total time was up for exchange. They hardly had an idea of 'free' time, and if they did, there was not a lot of it. To make ends meet more of their time had to be at the disposal of others. In this sense they were more dominated by an 'economy of time' than the weavers. And even if it did not all add up to a grand total, because their work was performed under a variety

---

14 A recent study of the growth of domestic servants in contemporary Britain comes dangerously close to such an interpretation. By imprecise definition of the term Nicky Gregson and Michelle Lowe in *Servicing the Middle Classes: Class, Gender and Waged Domestic Labour in Contemporary Britain*, London: Routledge, 1994 imply that cleaners enjoy more 'control' over their work, and notably over the amount of time they work and their organisation of time while working, in comparison with nannies who are not only professionally qualified but also command considerably higher rates of pay.

of exchange relations, more of the total was absorbed by labour exchanges. In a quantitative sense time represented an important medium of exchange.

No single causal factor determined these variations in control over the disposability of time between the two occupational groups. It was not down to their employers nor to their husbands. Rather the women's lives were like a jigsaw where the different pieces fitted together and mutually reinforced each other. Control over the disposal of time comprised one element in such a configuration, caused and reinforced by the other elements and in its turn also reproducing and making them viable. The variation in control over disposal of their own time between weavers and casual women workers, although not carved out by them, gave those with more of it greater opportunities and more power to determine the rest of their lives.

Modalities of experience of time and the life course

On a daily level weavers' understanding of what constituted 'work' was clearly quite different from that of the casual workers, being delimited in time and place. But the difference did not end there. From the temporal accounts they gave of their lives it emerged that weavers' and casual workers' different relation to time extended far beyond the daily routine and to the life course as such.

In discussion weavers placed far less emphasis than casual workers on age or stages of life, and marriage was not presented as their major life-changing event. Life seemed less punctuated and more continuous through time for them since it was not divided up into temporal units defined in terms of marriage and fertility. Neither personal nor world events were

remembered as being before or after marriage, or before and after having children.

By contrast the memory of casual workers did seem to rely much more heavily on locating events in terms of the temporal sequence of rites of passage. They positioned events in terms of proximity to a timed reference point in their own personal past, and most notably referred to the marriages, births and deaths of their immediate family and close neighbours or friends. The times when they began 'courting' their husbands, their own and others' illnesses, the onset of frailty of parents, were also frequently mentioned. It was as if such life course events formed the basic frame of time reference, or personal calendar, by which they fixed all other events and changes.

To a certain extent this privileging of personal rites of passage did mirror the casual workers' experience of life through time: marriage did represent a watershed for them in a way that it did not for the weavers. Before they married or before they had children they had all worked full-time in standard conditions of paid employment and had also performed domestic labour for their parents, whereas afterwards they did not. But for weavers the change in marital status or becoming a mother made much less difference to their 'working' life.

The lives of weavers and casual women workers were thus subject to quite different temporaliies, different orderings of events through time. For the latter the life course was more chopped up into distinct and successive segments, the transitions between them being of such momentous significance that they were marked by rites of passage. The intergenerational cycle of family life was such that the change from being a daughter in the family of origin to a wife and mother in the new family they formed assumed a significance for them that it could not hold for the weavers. And within each segment of the life

course weavers and casual women also experienced different forms of temporality, not least in their paid employment.

Moreover, this variation both in temporalities and in subjective understanding and experience of time between the two groups has to be seen as one aspect of a much larger set of features, or pattern of living, which encompassed not only the paid work and domestic labour that I have discussed but also their friendship, neighbourhood and community networks and relationships that I have barely touched on.

Although weavers' community and workplace overlapped in so far as co-workers often lived near each other, and neighbours and relatives also worked in mills, their friendship and social networks appeared to be more rooted in their situation of working in the same place than in living nearby while those of casual workers seemed more strongly linked to a community base of women living in close proximity to each other.

The centrality of the neighbourhood to the lives of the casual women workers meant that they were more subject than the weavers to community norms and rules, including those regulating the timing of domestic tasks. In most local communities there were established norms laying down which day of the week washing, drying, and ironing were to be done, which day the steps were to be 'donkeyed' and so on. Monday was customarily allocated for washing. It was acceptable to bake on Sunday but not to wash. In Bolton house-cleaning duties for younger women were to be done on Friday night but in Rochdale on Thursday. Friday and Thursday were known respectively in Bolton and in Rochdale as 'bucket' night and 'hellfire' night.[15] Teenage daughters were expected to stay in

---

15 Evidence of these weekly routines from my own interviews is corroborated for Rochdale by Michelle Abendstern in *Expression and*

(continues on next page)

and help with the cleaning on that evening, so few young people frequented the town centre that night to go dancing or to the cinema.

The force of community constraints reinforces the argument that casual women's control over time was more apparent than real given that their latitude in the management of time was subject to external constraints which set down the right order and day to do things on. The weavers, however, appeared not to be constrained by such regulations: there was no regularity about the days they allocated for specific chores. Many did their washing on Sunday.[16] Nor were they concerned about possible criticism from their neighbours or more general social opprobrium that might be elicited by their irregular domestic routines.

This different type of rootedness in neighbourhood and community throws light also on the different sources and forms of self-esteem available to the two groups. For weavers self-esteem was associated to their role as skilled workers; they took pride in the number of looms they managed, their speed of

---

Control. A Study of Working-Class Leisure and Gender 1918-1939: A Case Study of Rochdale using Oral History Methods, Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Essex, 1986, and for Bolton in the large oral history project *Growing Up in Bolton,* 1981-3.

16 The Mass-Observation investigation into 'motives and methods' of clothes washing in Bolton (Mass-Observation *Clothes-Washing Report,* 1939) reveals variability in washing routines amongst weavers, and also between weavers and Bolton women more generally. However, because it treats all women homogenously as 'housewives', regardless of differences in their occupations, these variations are hardly commented on, except in terms of the 'efficiency' or 'intelligence' of particular women. The report's author deems certain methods and traditions, including the local communal rule of Monday as washday, as outdated and hence 'unintelligent'. Thus she would implicitly view weavers with their greater flexibility as more 'modern' and 'rational' than those women who remained constrained by prevailing local customs.

work, and level of earnings. The self-reputation of the casual workers, in contrast, was tied up with how well they coped in comparison with others in their community in making ends meet. Some presented success in keeping the family fed and clothed on very meagre resources as giving their greatest sense of achievement, and these criteria were also deployed in judgement of their friends and neighbours.

Their life experiences combined to position weavers and casual workers differently in the division between home and work, between public and private spheres, and consequently to life course events. Each of these have their distinctive temporalities, with their differing scansions and orderings of events: time regulation of paid work versus unpaid labour; public and private regulation of time; life course structuring of time. On each of these three dimensions of temporality casual women workers were distinguished from weavers, and the combination of these dimensions deepened and mutually reinforced each other. Under such circumstances it is not surprising that each group constructed the division between home and work so differently, according a different importance to each, and placing different emphases on home and work as potential sources of identity. Their different perceptions of the passage of time and the different meanings they subjectively attached to it were also an effect of their different positioning.

Thus the different understandings of time over the life course of weavers and casual workers were socially conditioned by their positioning with respect to the division between home and workplace, public and private, community and family networks. Although casual workers were more tied up with 'female' life events and the life course the reason for this was the overall social structuring of time. I am therefore not suggesting that casual workers were 'closer to nature'. My argument *opposes* any crude suggestion that women's time is more regulated than men's by cyclical or biological phases of life. There was nothing 'natural' about the circumstances of

either group of women, and it would be quite misleading to view one as being more womanly and the other, by implication, as less womanly and hence more manly.

What I hope to have demonstrated is the existence of different femininities, weavers and casual workers having distinct gendered subjectivities as women that were structured by their different experiences of life. Their different modes of structuring of time were central to the place accorded to the passage of time in constructing their own identities.

Conclusion

In speaking of an 'economy of time' this chapter has contrasted what might be described as a fairly conventional dualism between work-time and own-time or free-time with a situation where such a distinction scarcely operated. The economy of time of most of the women outlined here did not fit this classic model.

I have emphasized the differences between the two groups of women, and to these examples could also add the domestic servants from my earlier research who had no free time at their disposal even in formal terms. But, clearly, important differences existed between the two kinds of absence of free time of casual women workers and maids. Further, assembly line work, while opening up a division between work-time and free-time, also entailed a total loss of control over time once placed at the disposal of employers.

Moreover by adopting the wider perspective of an economy of time, it becomes possible to theorise the hierarchy of women's economic position, and confront structured inequalities *between* working class women. In the situation explored here, a hierarchy of exchange of time existed in so far as weavers could purchase the labour of casual workers,

entailing an unequal exchange and a relation of structured inequality between them. So long as they remained in work, weavers were in a stronger economic position than those whose services they bought. And of course it was precisely the 'casual' women who were selling them their services. Each group had an unequal command of time, as well as of money; and an unequal relation to the disposability of time.

Since differences in control over the disposal of time and differences in temporal modalities of life undoubtedly represent an important area of variation between women it could be fruitful to extend the kind of analysis outlined here more widely to women other than weavers and casual women workers. Examination of different dimensions of temporality and the correlative experience of time made possible by a broader conception of work has provided a distinctive perspective on difference between women. It also draws attention to specific forms of appropriation and subordination that may not otherwise be revealed. Adopting this wider perspective thus opens up the possibility of analysing inequalities generated by unequal exchanges of time both between genders and within them.

EUI WORKING PAPERS

EUI Working Papers are published and distributed by the
European University Institute, Florence

Copies can be obtained free of charge
– depending on the availability of stocks – from:

The Publications Officer
European University Institute
Badia Fiesolana
I-50016 San Domenico di Fiesole (FI)
Italy

Please use order form overleaf

Publications of the European University Institute

To

The Publications Officer
European University Institute
Badia Fiesolana
I-50016 San Domenico di Fiesole (FI) – Italy
Telefax No: +39/55/4685 636
E-mail: publish@datacomm.iue.it

From

Name .....
Address.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

❒ Please send me a complete list of EUI Working Papers
❒ Please send me a complete list of EUI book publications
❒ Please send me the EUI brochure Academic Year 1996/97

Please send me the following EUI Working Paper(s):

No, Author .....
Title: .....
No, Author .....
Title: .....
No, Author .....
Title: .....
No, Author .....
Title: .....

Date .....

Signature .....

Working Papers of the European Forum

EUF No. 94/1
Miroslav HROCH
The Social Interpretation of Linguistic Demands in European National Movements

EUF No. 94/2
Perry ANDERSON
The Invention of the Region 1945-1990

EUF No. 94/3
Laurence COLE
Andreas Hofer: The Social and Cultural Construction of a National Myth in Tirol, 1809-1909

***

EUF No. 95/1
Diemut BUBECK
A Feminist Approach to Citizenship

EUF No. 95/2
Renaud DEHOUSSE/Thomas CHRISTIANSEN (eds)
What Model for the Committee of the Regions? Past Experiences and Future Perspectives

EUF No. 95/3
Jens BONKE
The Concepts of Work and Care - An Economic Perspective Applied to Britain and Denmark

EUF No. 95/4
Jens BONKE
Education, Work and Gender - An International Comparison

EUF No. 95/5
Henriëtte MAASSEN VAN DEN BRINK/Wim GROOT
Household Production and Time Allocation, the End of the Male Chauvinist Model

EUF No. 95/6
Andrés BARRERA-GONZÁLEZ
Language, Collective Identities and Nationalism in Catalonia, and Spain in General

EUF No. 95/7
Diemut BUBECK
Gender, Work and Citizenship: Between Social Realities and Utopian Visions

EUF No. 95/8
Miriam A. GLUCKSMANN
Gendered Economies of Time: Women Workers in North-West England